

Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies, Uppsala University, Autumn 2022

Course Convenor: Alexandre Raffoul

9 December 2022

Final Course Paper: Causes of the Cyprus 1974 Armed Conflict

Florina Tufescu

Introduction

This paper provides an analysis of the war between Cyprus and Turkey, unfolded over a single summer month (15 July-16 August 1974), which ended with a ceasefire and *de facto* partition. This makes it much more difficult for researchers to be unbiased in their interpretations of an unresolved conflict and also means that much of the salient evidence remains classified (Mallinson, 2009: 751-752; Hugh-Wilson, 2011: 84). Any research conclusions are thus provisional.

The consulted sources seem to confirm realist theory, at least in relation to this war, since they show how different states pursued their own interests in Cyprus with little consideration of the impact on the native population. Only two of the sources (Hughes-Wilson, 2011 & Zelepos, 2014) arguably fit more closely within the individual level of analysis by assigning a main responsibility for the tragedy to the ethnarch of Cyprus. The choice of the realist paradigm has thus emerged from the material itself and is supplemented by liberal insights where the source lent itself to such a reading.

The main conclusion is that Cyprus was a secondary actor in the drama that led to its partition. The examination of secondary sources has led me to agree with Mallinson (2007 & 2009) that it was the conflicting interests of Greece, Turkey and the UK, enshrined in the 1960 treaties and in the Constitution which, combined with the decades-long history of fighting between the Turkish and the Greek Cypriots, prevented the creation of a common Greek-Turkish Cypriot identity, leading to the collapse of the bi-ethnic government just three years after independence and ultimately to the partition of 1974.

Theoretical overview

Realism is a system-level theory that seeks to uncover the mechanisms of conflict by examining the dynamics of state interactions against an alleged background of global anarchy (Levy, 2001: 7). States are the only noteworthy actors in the realist scenario yet they are virtually undistinguishable, driven entirely by the need to ensure their own preservation and, when possible, to expand their power and thus their security. States are always in competition with each other and any alliance they form is exclusively motivated by self-interest (Levy, 2001: 7-8). The essence of the international game is the (re)distribution of power. Realists differ as to which particular distribution decreases the risk of armed conflict but concur in regarding peace as the result of a transient balance of power (bipolarity or multipolarity) or of the transient dominance of a single actor aka hegemon (Aggestam & Höglund, 2012: 85-86). Realist theory assumes the inefficiency of the international legal system proposed by institutional liberalism while also denying the transformative possibilities envisaged by constructivism; it is founded on the abstraction of states as unitary, 'rational' actors pursuing immutably selfish aims, although the attribute of rationality is disputed and has been described by the leading realist Waltz as lacking 'empirical meaning' (Quinn, 2018: 78).

Analysis of the conflict

From a realist perspective, Cyprus' interest at the time the war broke out was simply its survival as an undivided state. Its government attempted to ensure it by maintaining neutrality, e.g. by allowing both the Soviet Union and the US and the UK to maintain their spying bases on its territory and by insisting on a UN rather than a NATO peace-keeping force to contain the existing ethnic tensions.

The country was severely weakened by ethnic conflict, exploited by other states from the 1940s onwards. Firstly by the UK whose keenness to retain Cyprus, formally annexed in 1914, led it to train the Turkish Cypriots to fight the Greek Cypriot nationalists (Kadioglu & Bezci, 2020: 643) and allegedly even to fund Turkish nationalist propaganda (Mallinson, 2009: 738). When retaining the island became too costly due to the strength of the EOKA Cypriot Greek armed resistance, the UK manoeuvred to make Turkey one of the deciding actors on Cyprus despite the fact that the latter

had renounced all its territorial ambitions under the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. This was explicitly done to prevent enosis, thereby enabling the continued British presence on the island (British Foreign Office correspondence qtd. in Mallinson, 2009: 738).

After Cyprus achieved independence, Greece became keen on enosis, given its strengthened position as a NATO member wishing to obtain an advantage over its ally Turkey, despite the fact that the vast majority of Greek Cypriots no longer wished for enosis by this stage (Peristianis, 103). This keenness intensified after 1967, when Greece became a military dictatorship that exploited ethnic tensions by covertly providing funding and training for the EOKA-B military network which planned the ousting of Makarios.

Turkey was equally determined for its part to annex a substantial part of Cyprus in order to ensure its own security and to obtain an advantage in future negotiations with Greece over 'oil exploration ... rights in the Aegean, territorial limits, shipping access' etc. (Stern, 1974: 72). It also pursued its objectives through the fuelling of ethnic conflict and the equally covert and more substantial support of the TMT network (Kadioglu & Bezci, 2020).

The immediate cause of the war was the Greek junta's ousting of Makarios, followed by the 'unbelievably stupid move' of appointing the notorious terrorist Sampson in his stead (Turkish official qtd. in Stern, 1975: 63). This gave Turkey a legitimate reason to invade, under the terms of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee. The fact that the junta was replaced by a civilian, negotiation-willing, government only a few days later and Sampson replaced by Clerides did not deter Turkey's advance into Cyprus: realising its military superiority and the unlikelihood of US retaliation, Turkey engaged in a textbook illustration of *realpolitik* by continuing to participate in perfunctory diplomatic negotiations while annexing almost 40% of the country, a move consolidated by the subsequent illegal settlement of approximately 100 000 Turkish citizens into what is now recognised by Turkey and by no other state as the Turkish Northern Republic of Cyprus (Mallinson, 2007: 495).

The partition was made possible by the American hegemon's completely self-interested decision of not antagonising Turkey, deemed as a more valuable NATO ally than Greece (Stern, 1975: 74) in dealing with the Soviet threat. In the earlier crisis of 1964, the US intervention on behalf of Cyprus had brought Turkey closer to the Soviet Union (Kadioglu & Bezci, 2020: 647), a risk which the Nixon administration was unwilling to take.

Critical discussion of the theory

The realist reading lacks nuance and disregards the national and individual-level factors that were in fact crucial to the development and outcome of the conflict.

A liberal approach would highlight two additional factors:

1) the absence of democracy and of a democratic tradition in Cyprus. The 18% Cypriot Turkish minority had not been represented in government since 1963, when intercommunal violence led to the breakdown of the power-sharing arrangements. Due to the direct rule of Cyprus by London imposed from the time of the 1931 nationalist riots until 1960, there was no recent experience of intercommunal collaboration in politics and administration (Zelevos, 2014: 17). The absence of a modern Cypriot, civic identity left the space open to the meddling of Turkey and Greece.

2) the absence of democracy in Greece. With a democratic government in place, the coup and the subsequent war would arguably not have occurred.

The individual level is also important in this conflict. Zelevos suggests that the tragedy might have been prevented but for Makarios' obstinacy on a UN rather than NATO peace-keeping force, allegedly derived from his 'deep-rooted resentment' against the West (2014: 23) while Hughes-Wilson attributes the collapse of the Cyprus government entirely to Makarios' actions (2011: 84-85).

I find these explanations unlikely and tend to agree with Stern's assessment that far greater responsibility lies with the US, more precisely president Nixon and the secretary of state H. Kissinger. The administration 'tolerated the extinction of constitutional government in Athens in exchange for supposedly stable military base rights' (Stern, 1975: 40); it failed to firmly condemn

the ousting of Makarios and it went on to condone the Turkish invasion, which might otherwise have been stopped, as it was in the previous crisis during the Johnson presidency. Kissinger clearly preferred the stability of authoritarian regimes (Stern, 1975: 77) and was a *realpolitik* ideologist (Spindler 125), whose views were adopted and very successfully implemented by his former student, the Turkish PM Ecevit (Stern, 1975: 71)

Conclusion

Space limitations have only enabled me to consider the arguments I consider most plausible, without being able to justify the exclusion of other viewpoints. To give just one example, the US lack of significant response to the Turkish invasion has also been attributed to the presidency's preoccupation with the Watergate scandal, but I believe the administration's response would have been similar in the absence of this crisis given its documented ideological beliefs. Overall, the war makes most sense within a realist perspective probably because those who organised and condoned it were inspired by it. This brings attention to the ethical dilemma of realism: it is not simply descriptive but generative of political reality: 'Much of international security politics ... is guided by (neo)realist perspectives' (Spindler, 2013: 125), which help justify and normalise the often morally unacceptable decisions always taken, as liberalism reminds us, by particular, more or less representative, groups, in the name of states.

The fact that Turkey is a valued NATO member and EU candidate, facing no real pressure to solve the TRNT situation, is just another proof of the continued dominance of realist thinking in political circles and of the need for it to be more seriously challenged.

Reference list

Fjelde, Hanne (2012). Orsaker till krig och väpnade konflikter. *Om krig och fred: En introduktion till freds- och konflikt studier*. Ed. Karin Aggestam & Kristine Höglund. Lund: Studentlitteratur. pp. 83-96.

Hughes-Wilson, John (2011). The forgotten war: a brief history of the battle for Cyprus, 1974. *RUSI Journal*. 56 (5), pp. 84–92.

Kadioğlu, Aytac & Egemen Bezci. (2020). The mystery of intra-alliance intelligence: Turkey's covert operations in the Cyprus conflict. *Middle Eastern Studies*. 56 (4), pp. 638-652, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2020.1737524.

Quinn, Adam. (2018) Realisms. *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*. Ed. Alexandra Ghenciu & William Wohlforth. pp.71-86.

Levy, Jack. S. (2001). Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A levels-of-Analysis Approach. *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*. Ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson & Pamela Aall. Washington DC. pp. 4-18.

Mallinson, William (2009). Cyprus, Britain, the USA, Turkey and Greece in 1977: Critical Submission or Submissive Criticism? *Journal of Contemporary History*. 44(4), pp. 737–752.

Mallinson, William (2007). US Interests, British Acquiescence and the Invasion of Cyprus. *BJPIR* 9, pp. 494–508.

Peristianis, Nicos (2006). Divided Cyprus: Modernity, history, and an island in conflict. Ed. Y Papadakis, N. Peristianis, N. & G Welz (Eds.). Indiana University Press. pp. 100-120.

Quinn, Adam. (2018) Realisms. *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*. Ed. Alexandra Ghciu & William Wohlforth. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198777854.001.0001_

Spindler, Manuela (2013). Neo-realist theory. *International Relations: A Self-Guide to Theory*. Verlag Barbara Budrich. pp. 124-138.

Stern, Laurence (1975). Bitter Lessons: How We Failed in Cyprus. *Foreign Policy* 19. pp. 34-78.

Zelevos, Ioannis (2014). The Historical Background of the Cyprus Problem: Just A Conflict of Ethnic Nationalism? *Austrian Review of International and European Law*, 19, 13-28.